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Baptists rally to support amendment

By Tony Martin
Associate Editor

The Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission (CAC) hosted an early morning prayer rally Oct. 27 on the steps of the Capitol in Jackson, to boost support for the marriage amendment on Mississippi's November 2 ballot that would limit marriage to the union of one man and one woman.

More than 200 people participated in the rally, held in conjunction with the Mississippi Baptist Convention's annual meeting at First Church, Jackson.

"This is not an 'anti' rally — it's a 'pro for God's principles' kind of rally," said Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) in Jackson.

Futral was keynote speaker at the rally, which included opening remarks from Jimmy Porter, CAC executive director; prayer and Scripture reading by Lee Yancey, CAC consultant; and a musical solo by Graham Smith, MBCB church music director.

"Something has got to happen, not just with same-sex marriage but biblical marriage has got to take a different place among us," Futral said. "There is an incredible agenda working against us that has to do with gay rights; it has to do with same-sex marriage; it has to do not with the re-definition... but they literally want to 'un-define' marriage so that there are no standards."

Futral admonished the crowd to take action. "Assembled here on the steps of the



RALLY FOR MARRIAGE — Mississippi Baptists awaiting the start of the second day of the Mississippi Baptist Convention gathered with other Mississippians on the south steps of the Capitol in the early morning hours to show support for a proposed state constitutional amendment to limit the definition of marriage to the union of one man and one woman. Jim Futral (at microphone), executive director-treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board in Jackson, addressed the crowd. The prayer rally was sponsored by the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, an agency of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. (Photo by Tony Martin)

Capitol, there is a powerful force just to get out the word. This is what God said, and this is what we need to do. Lets do it."

A ban on same-sex marriage was also on the ballot in ten other states: Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Utah. Several states have already voted in favor of an amendment protecting traditional marriage: Hawaii voted 69.2%; Alaska voted 68.11%; Nebraska voted 70.1%; Nevada voted 67.1%; and Louisiana voted 78%.

Supporters of the amendment in Mississippi anticipated a high percentage of voters will cast their ballots in favor of the marriage amendment, so why hold a rally?

"Number one, we wanted to make people aware that this was on the ballot November 2, and we wanted them at the polls," said Yancey. "Number two, we wanted Mississippi to be a leader of Christian values. We've asked each (Mississippi Baptist) association to have a local rally at their courthouse, and we wanted to demonstrate that."

Louisiana voted on a similar amendment about a month ago, and it passed by 78%, said Yancey. The Louisiana amendment has already been challenged in court, because the amendment banned homosexual civil unions as well as marriage.

Detractors complained that because both issues were included in the amendment, it brought

into question whether it was a legal petition, Yancey said.

"In Mississippi, we've only focused on gay marriage, which makes it much more likely to stand up in court," he pointed out.

U.S. President George W. Bush supports a federal constitutional amendment outlawing same-sex marriages. Senator John Kerry opposes gay marriage but is against a constitutional amendment to ban it.

"We should not create special rights for homosexuals," Yancey said. "We aren't going to change our law to fit their lifestyle."

A movement in the U.S. Congress and among the states is also advancing the idea of a constitutional amendment to the U.S. Constitution banning same sex marriage that would have to be applied equally to all states.

Federal constitutional amendments are difficult to ratify, with super majorities required in Congress and among the states.

The amendment to the Mississippi Constitution states that marriage may only be between a man and a woman, and prohibits Mississippi from recognizing legalized same-sex unions from other states.

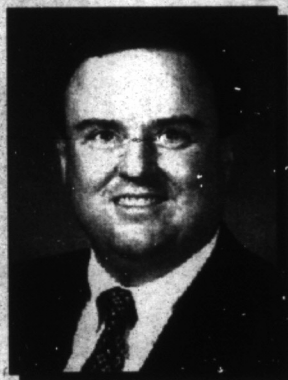
"God cares about marriage," said Futral at the rally, "and [the vote] is not going to change God's mind about marriage. Whatever is voted on and whatever happens, God is not going to change — but it is going to say a lot about me and a lot about you and about where we stand."

Editor's note: At press time on the morning of November 2, results of the vote on the state constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage were not available.



SUPPORT FOR MARRIAGE — Participants in the October 27 prayer rally for traditional marriage kneel in prayer on the south steps of the Capitol in Jackson, asking God for His will to be done in the upcoming vote to support a proposed amendment to define marriage in Mississippi as the union of one man and one woman. (Photo by Tony Martin)

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The Mississippi Baptist way

There's a hoary tale from many generations ago about a group of Baptist preacher friends in another state who got together every year to ride the train to the state convention meeting. As the story goes, the preacher friends started arguing on the train home about a particular year's convention meeting and a gunfight broke out among them right there in the passenger car.

Apparently the preachers were better at being on target with Scripture than they were with hot lead, as no one was reported to have been seriously injured. One is left to ponder whether they all got together for the train trip to the next year's meeting.

Mississippi Baptists have had their disagreements over the years about the conduct of state convention meetings, but thankfully there's no record of gunplay on the trip home after one of the meetings. Quite to the contrary, the 2004 annual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention was a truly harmonious gathering of like-minded Christian brothers and sisters intent on doing their part to help win Mississippi and the world to Jesus.

One of the highlights of the 2004 annual meeting was the election of the convention's first Hispanic officer. Joel Medina, bivocational pastor of Iglesia Internacional Las Americas in Carthage, was elected by acclamation to serve the convention as second vice-president for the coming year.

Take a moment to savor that fact. While far too much of the rest of the state and the country quibble over racial, ethnic, and religious divisions — even styles of worship in many of our churches — Mississippi Baptists came together to elect by acclamation someone who may not look exactly like most of us, who may not talk like most of us, who may not come from the same background as most of us, but is as welcome in our company of believers as any one of us.

Surely God smiles on such a brotherhood.

After a year of very capable leadership, Gene Henderson, pastor of First Church, Brandon, was reelected to a second one-year term as president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. Like Medina, he was elected by acclamation.

Just prior to delivering the convention sermon, Thad Moore, pastor of Poplar Springs Drive Church in Meridian, was reelected to a second term as first-vice president. Like Medina and Henderson, he was elected by acclamation as were recording secretary Gus Merritt and associate recording Secretary Michael Weeks.

Messengers approved a \$31,314,491 Co-operative Program budget for the coming year, a 1.49% increase. That was also done without dissent or opposition.

Does all of that sound like a convention united?

Mississippi Baptists have argued over the years (we are Baptists, after all), but we have consistently and forthrightly addressed those problems in a Christian way and proceeded with our Kingdom work. Even those who didn't get their way obviously felt it important to keep the convention strong and focused on its mission.

That's the Mississippi Baptist way. While Baptists in other states fuss and fight and split, Mississippi Baptists keep their

"SON, THIS RAKE IS LIKE SALVATION—IT'S FREE TO YOU, BUT BOUGHT AND PAID FOR, BUT YOU HAVE TO REACH OUT AND TAKE IT TO ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING. ENJOY!"



eyes on the eternal prize. In both our secular and Baptist worlds today, that is truly a gift from God. When we are tuned in to His Will, He will lead us.

Mississippi Baptists depart the 2004 annual meeting as a monolith, with a very ambitious agenda for 2005. That agenda includes every one of us in some special way, so let's give thanks to the Lord of the harvest and get busy in the fields (Matthew 9:37-38).

That, too, is the Mississippi Baptist way.

GUEST OPINION:



Messengers' will is final authority

By Chuck Kelley, president
New Orleans Seminary

Southern Baptist Convention messengers in June 2004 that the seminary adopt sole membership at their October 2004 meeting by amending the seminary's charter."

NOBTS trustees did vote on October 13 to propose an amendment to our charter making the SBC the sole member as our legal corporation, as requested at the 2004 SBC annual meeting in Indianapolis. They also voted to attach to that proposal a brief list of their concerns about sole membership in Louisiana and to have me explain their concerns to SBC messengers at the 2005 convention in Nashville.

When we read the BP release we immediately contacted the reporter, who told us his story had been changed. We then

lodged a complaint with Baptist Press. They told us the situation would be reviewed. We have yet to see any correction or apology, and thus felt it necessary to relate the accurate story.

I will confess we do not understand the apparent eagerness of BP to accuse NOBTS trustees of not responding to the messengers of the SBC. This is a grave and serious charge. Why did BP not accept the story of their own reporter who was present in the meeting and who sought and received an interpretation of the motion? Why overturn the reporter's story when it agreed with independent stories written by two other reporters who were present? Before a BP editor changed the basic fact of his reporter's story and accused an

entity trustee board of not complying with a request from SBC messengers, why would he not talk to the entity president or other reporters present?

Last fall BP censored and refused to print a very brief statement from our trustees explaining their decision on sole membership to Southern Baptists. Last summer we saw BP and SBC Life, a magazine published by the SBC Executive Committee, print only the Executive Committee side of this complex issue, and at the Indianapolis convention all who were present saw that we were given only a token opportunity to share our concerns on sole membership with SBC messengers. This fall we have seen BP go so far as to change the most important fact in a story written by the reporter they sent to cover the meeting.

The vote of the messengers is always the final authority in Southern Baptist life. We think the typical messenger wants to hear both sides of a story before casting that authoritative vote. No later than December we will release a concise statement of the reservations we have to the proposal on sole membership. The decision of the messengers will be implemented.

CNN focuses on Baptists in faith feature

ATLANTA (BP) — The evangelical community drew CNN's spotlight Oct. 24 in a news special, *Fight Over Faith*. The CNN Presents program's premise, while far from a new assertion, was that there is a division between evangelicals and others in the U.S. Christian sector over how closely the Bible's teachings should be followed.

The "soldiers of the cross [are] in a family feud," CNN correspondent Carol Marin said in opening the special, which featured Mike Hamlet, pastor of First Church of North Spartanburg, S.C., as well as SBC President Bobby Welch during his cross-country bus tour in which he called on Southern Baptists to evangelize and baptize one million individuals.

CNN's Marin said Southern Baptists, as the "most conservative" of the "mainline" denominations in the country, "have all but declared war on American culture" in the "fight over faith."

The battle "is as much about culture as it is about religion," she continued.

"It is a fight for faith primarily against Satan," said Welch, who also is pastor of First Church in Daytona Beach, Fla. "Our enemy is Satan. Our enemy is not conservatives or liberals, Democrats or Republicans. Those are not our enemy."

In this fight, Welch said, "eternity is in the balance."

Yet it didn't take long for the program to turn to politics. The opening clip featured CNN anchor Aaron Brown saying born-again Christians "are making their presence felt well beyond the pulpit."

Marin pointed to a "new phenomenon" in evangelical churches across America —

their "enormous political influence." She said there are some "who believe that churches should have nothing to do with registering people to vote."



Hamlet

Hamlet acknowledged, "Those people are the ones who absolutely fear the evangelical community. They are the ones who would say to us sit down over there and shut up. Be religious. You're not going to have a part in our culture."

Born-again, evangelical voters are a "very significant voting bloc," said Richard Land, president of the SBC's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), during an address at Hamlet's church shown on the program.

Clips of the ERLC's iVoteValues.com Mobile Voter Registration Rig and Information Center were shown at a stop in Asheville, N.C. The iVoteValues.com initiative is proof, Marin said, that Southern Baptists are serious about educating voters on the issues.

The truck has visited 20 states and hosted more than 30,000 people since it began its run at June's Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Indianapolis.

The pro-life and same-sex marriage issues "in large part fuel the evangelical vote," Marin suggested, noting at the iVoteValues.com truck, "there is a distinct mixture of faith and politics" along with a "music video to stir the hearts of a potential voter."

Hamlet said people who meet him often are surprised to learn that he is a conservative evangelical, saying many buy into the false stereotype of an evangelical as someone who is "mean-spirited, hard, and ignorant about points of view."

"Liberals in the country are afraid of evangelicals," Hamlet continued, saying that while others may compromise, an "evangelical's faith is built on a certain principle — a commitment to Christ, a commitment to God's Word."

"My position is based on a set of moral absolutes," he said. "That's the problem America has; we now have no moral absolutes."

C. Welton Gaddy, president of the Interfaith Alliance, said there is a "religious McCarthyism" afoot. "There are power-hungry people, both in the church and in politics, who are using those issues to divide congregations in order to identify who the true believers are," he asserted.

Gaddy contended that the "religious right" uses a "litmus test" in order to "pass judgment on another person's spirituality, not by asking the singular question about your relationship to God and your belief in Christ, but where you are on a variety of socio-political issues."

Gaddy said "Christianity is more exclusive now than it was at its inception." This exclusivity is a "danger to America's diversity," Marin quoted Gaddy as saying.

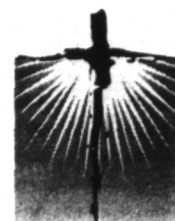
Hamlet told Marin that Jesus Himself said He is "the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except by me," noting that Muhammad, Buddha, and all the other religious leaders are dead. "We

serve a risen Savior through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

When asked by the CNN reporter if he could assert "there is only one way to the Kingdom of God," Gaddy responded: "I will never attempt to play God, and to make any statement that is sweepingly exclusive of other people is to assume that I can make a judgment that I believe only God alone can make."

"There may be a lot of things about the Bible that I don't understand, but I'm not really given the choice of what I can believe and what I can't believe," Hamlet said.

The program featured brief segments with a family from the Spartanburg church, Cassidy and Robin Carlisle and their two children, Rick, 15, and Caitlin, 11.



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Caitlin told of becoming a Christian at age three. Marin asked the girl, "Can a three-year-old really understand or know enough to..."

"All you have to understand," Caitlin said, "is, I'm a sinner and I need Jesus, and Jesus died for me. That's all you need to understand."



Carlisle

Looking back

10 years ago

The Baptist Sunday School Board will produce undated curriculum to support widely-known speaker and writer Josh McDowell's Right from Wrong campaign, according to McDowell and Baptist Sunday School Board President Jimmy Draper in Nashville.

20 years ago

Plans are finalized for an emphasis on the Planned Growth in Giving program during the upcoming Mississippi Baptist Convention meeting as one of the best ways to meet the sweeping goals of Southern Baptists' Bold Mission Thrust emphasis.

50 years ago

Souls in Conflict, the fourth motion picture produced by evangelist Billy Graham — this one filmed against the backdrop of his recent highly-successful London Crusade — is shown in Jackson in the City Auditorium and presented in "natural color."

Cell studies 'barbaric'

WASHINGTON (BP) — Stem cell research that destroys human embryos is a "barbaric assault on the dignity of humankind" and should be rejected by both the public and private sectors, members of a Southern Baptist think tank said in a statement released Oct. 26. The Research Institute of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) staked out its position on an issue that has sharply divided the American public and been debated in this year's highly contentious presidential election campaign. In its 11/2-page statement, the institute, which consists of Southern Baptist academicians, ethicists and lawyers, endorsed regenerative medicine using stem cells from non-embryonic sources but condemned embryonic research because of its destructive nature. "[W]hile affirming the promise this research has for good, we object strongly to the notion that pursuing cures for some ever justifies intentionally destroying other human lives to achieve those cures," the statement said. "Adult stem cell research provides the opportunity to participate in the potential benefits of regenerative medicine without compromising deeply held beliefs about human life. Human embryonic stem cell research represents a barbaric assault on the dignity of humankind and, therefore, erodes one of the fundamental values that have shaped our civilization." Stem cells are the body's master cells that can develop into other cells and tissues. They are found not only in human embryos but in adult sources, such as bone marrow, umbilical cord blood, and placentas. The procurement of stem cells from an adult source does not harm the donor. "Only the most committed ideologue would continue to encourage embryo-destructive research in the face of these facts," according to the statement from the ERLC's Research Institute.

Baptist